

## **Ponder Fire Salvage Project**

The Ponderosa Fire began on August 29, 2017 at Ponderosa Way Road near the Ponderosa Reservoir in the rural community of Feather Falls. The fire burned 4,016 acres including 1,646 acres of NFS lands and consumed 55 structures.

Roads within the fire perimeter provide access to NFS lands and are main motor ways connecting the communities of Feather Falls and Forbestown.

High severity fire burned along Lumpkin Road before the intersection to the highly used Feather Falls National Recreation Trail at the southern end of the Feather Falls Scenic Area. Lumpkin Road is also a thoroughfare to a segment of the Feather River Ranger District that includes Golden Trout and Little Grass Valley Reservoir Campgrounds.

The Ponderosa Fire burned in a municipal watershed that drains into the South Fork Feather River, Middle Fork Feather River, and Ponderosa Reservoir before entering Lake Oroville which provides drinking water to 25 million of the state's 39 million people.

Powerlines and phone lines overlap with treatment units and PG&E has started falling trees that compromise and hinder maintenance of these lines.

The Feather River Ranger District proposes to salvage timber in areas of high vegetation burn severity on approximately 250 acres of NFS lands. Salvage treatment units are adjacent to roadside hazard tree removal units and include slash and site preparation, reforestation, and release treatments. Slash will be spread from logging operations to reduce erosion on the high soil burn severity areas that have no topsoil. To re-establish forested conditions within areas that burned with high vegetation burn severity, reforestation is proposed through cultural treatments. Areas would be reforested with tree species native to the ecological habitat type. Wide spaced cluster planting would be designed to achieve a more heterogeneous distribution of trees that would better mimic the aesthetics and composition of a natural stand. The wide-spaced cluster planting strategy is also designed to reduce costs of follow-up treatments such as pre-commercial thinning. Subsequent release treatment is designed to reduce competing vegetation which would likely inhibit the survival and growth of planted trees.

Salvage treatments are categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or an Environmental Assessment (EA) because they meet requirements of the Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15, Chapter 30, Categorical Exclusion from Documentation, 32.2, Category 13, "Salvage of dead and/or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction. The proposed action may include incidental removal of live or dead trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing" (36 CFR 220.6(e)(13)). The use of this category is based on the need to reduce future fuel recruitment within the WUI adjacent to NFS roads and high recreation use areas within the fire perimeter.

Site preparation, reforestation, and release activities are categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or an Environmental Assessment (EA) because they meet requirements of the Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15, Chapter 30, Categorical Exclusion from Documentation, 32.2, Category 5, "Regeneration of an area to native tree species, including site preparation that does not involve the use of herbicides or result in vegetation type conversion" (36 CFR 220.6(e)(5)). The use of this category is based on the need to plant seedlings in areas that burned at high vegetation burn severity to re-establish forested conditions.

Implementation is expected to occur as soon as the decision is signed (fall 2017) and reforestation activities are anticipated to begin in the fall 2018.

This project is not subject to notice, comment, and appeal.